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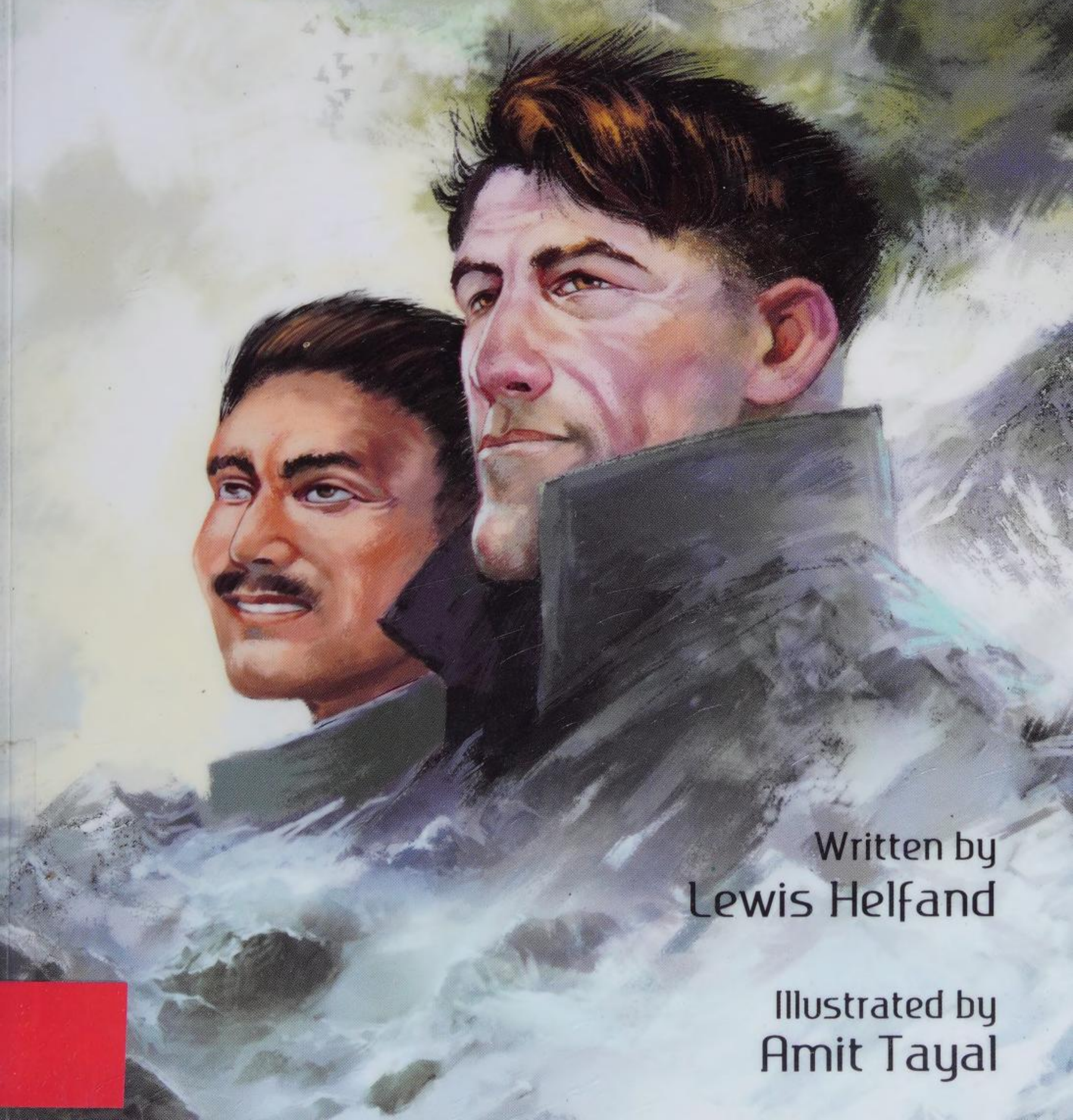
CONQUERING EVEREST

The Lives of Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay



Written by
Lewis Helfand

Illustrated by
Amit Tayal

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Summit
8,848 metres

Camp IX
8,504 metres

Camp VIII
7,894 metres

Camp VII
7,315 metres

Camp VI
7,010 metres

Camp V
6,706 metres

Camp IV (Advanced Base Camp) 6,462 metres

Camp III
6,157 metres

Camp II
5,913 metres

Camp I (Base Camp)
5,364 metres

Lewis Helfand

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CONQUERING EVEREST

The Lives of Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay

Sitting around the Campfire, telling the story, were:

Leabharlanna Chonndae
Phortláirge

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CAMPFIRE™

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lewis Helfand was born on 27th April 1978 in Philadelphia, and grew up in nearby Narberth, Pennsylvania. Although interested in cartoons and animation from a young age, by the time he was twelve, Lewis's focus had turned to writing. After completing high school, he remained in the Philadelphia area with the intention of pursuing a degree in English.

Four years later, with a degree in Political Science and a passion for comic books, Lewis began working for local publishers, proofreading books and newspaper articles. At the age of twenty-four, Lewis had been editing phonebooks for a year and a half, and felt no closer to his lifelong goal of writing comic books. So, one day, he decided to quit his job.

Lewis then spent the next two months working day and night to write and draw his first comic book, *Wasted Minute*. It tells the story of a world without crime where superheroes are forced to work regular jobs. To cover the cost of self-publishing, he began working odd jobs in offices and restaurants, and started exhibiting his book at local comic-book conventions. With the first issue received well, he was soon collaborating with other artists, and released four more issues over the next few years.

Outside the field of comic books, Lewis works as a freelance writer and reporter for a number of national print and online publications. He has covered everything from sports and travel to politics and culture for magazines such as *Renaissance*, *American Health and Fitness*, and *Computer Bits*.

EDMUND HILLARY

GEORGE LOWE

TENZING NORGAY

JOHN HUNT

CHARLES EVANS

TOM BOURDILLON

Year after year they came, reaching out, grasping, climbing, struggling, just to get a little bit higher.

They all came with one singular goal in mind – to get to the top.

The explorers from the West knew the mountain as Everest. But the Sherpas from the East, who lived in the shadow of the mountain, called it Chomolungma.

At 8,848 metres above sea level, it was the highest point on Earth.

Year after year they attempted to climb the Everest, and suffered disappointment and injury and death, for there was no shortage of ways to die on Everest.

Some lost fingers or toes to frostbite, while some met their death when the fragile ice gave way and sent them plummeting into the abyss.

Some met death in the form of an avalanche.

And some simply disappeared. Like in 1924, when climbers George Mallory and Andrew Irvine attempted to climb the mountain, the brutal winds wiped away their footprints... and they were never seen or heard of again.

But still the explorers kept coming, year after year, trying to reach the top of the world.

In 1953, the British were making their ninth attempt.

The summit of Everest was one of the last of the simple, classic challenges offered by nature. Reaching its pinnacle was considered to be a prize of momentous proportions.

All the major nations of the world were eager to reach the peak first. The goal seemed simple – to reach the top. But it was easier said than done, for there were no roads, no paths, and no footsteps to follow, not to mention the extremely difficult weather conditions.

The entire British Empire had been scoured and the best and the most experienced climbers had been chosen for this tremendous feat. The expedition comprised over 400 people, including eleven climbers, 362 porters, twenty Sherpas, and about 4,500 kilograms of baggage.

Among them were two climbers whose names would soon be linked to each other and to the mountain forever.

New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay. Hillary was an accomplished mountaineer, having climbed in New Zealand, Europe, and Asia.

Everest still looks the same, Tenzing. It looks just as treacherous as it did a year ago. And just as beautiful.

A year ago? I have been seeing it since I was a little boy, and it looks as supreme as ever.

Really? When was the first time you saw it?

Tenzing Norgay had attempted to climb Everest six times before, and had been at least 1,219 metres higher than any of the other expedition members.

I don't remember when I saw Everest for the first time. Maybe that's because it has always been a part of my life.

I was born as Namgyal Wangdi in the Kharta region of Tibet. I don't know the date, but I was told that it was during springtime and probably in 1914.

When I was very young, my father, Mingma, and my mother, Kinzom, decided to move to the Khumbu region of Nepal. We lived in the village of Thame, right in the shadow of Everest.

I can't tell you when we moved there, for we Sherpas are never really particular about dates. We have no written language or recorded history.

I learnt to speak not just Sherpa, but Tibetan, Nepali, and Hindustani. Yet, I never learnt to read or write because we had no formal education.

What we had was our family. Together, we worked in the fields and tended to a herd of yaks that belonged to the local monastry.

And we lived the same way too, with the animals below us as we slept.

Yaks were our livelihood. We used their wool to keep us warm, their milk to quench our thirst, and their strength to plough the fields. There was no one else to depend on, certainly not the locals.

Look, there's another batch of immigrants from Tibet. Each group that arrives here seems poorer than the last.

Survival depended on having a large family, to be able to work on the fields and tend to the animals... but then having a large family wasn't easy. Eight of my twelve brothers and sisters died as babies or in childhood.

And when I, too, fell ill at a young age, I seemed destined to be the ninth to suffer an early death.

Please Lama, tell me. Will my boy recover? Will he live?

Yes, he will, for he is the reincarnation of a very wealthy man.

This child will have a second chance at life. He should be given a new name for a fresh start, a name that reflects his past life.

From now on, Namgyal Wangdi will be called Tenzing Norgay. It means 'wealthy, fortunate follower of religion'.

I predict great things for your son. Great things indeed!

My parents wanted me to follow a spiritual path for those great things to occur. They even sent me to a monastery so I could train to become a lama.

You have to pay attention, Tenzing!

But the life of a lama didn't appeal to me. And my lack of interest angered one of the holy men.

That one blow on my head was enough to confirm that I wanted something different out of life, and it sent me running back to my parents.

No Tenzing, stop crying now. You don't have to go back if you don't want to. Your father and I can always use some help here.

While the life of a lama was not for me, I did seem to find out what I wanted to do at a young age.

It was the deepest snow I have ever seen. At one point I thought I wouldn't survive. An avalanche hit and the snow came up to our shoulders. We were stuck on Everest for weeks and--

What's Everest?

I was seven when the British began coming to Everest for their expeditions. They began hiring Sherpas from the local villages, and these Sherpas would return home with their tales of adventure.

It's what we call Chomolungma, the highest mountain in the world.

I think I knew right then that I wanted to be a mountaineer. I was fascinated by their stories of adventure and even their clothing.

You can't even walk in my boots, little one. Take them off.

No, I paid you to try them on. I'll take them off when I'm done.

I used to take my father's yaks to the higher pastures to graze, to where the snow and ice began.

I wish I could go higher.

I would think about Chomolungma throughout the day.

Come and play with us, Tenzing!

Don't bother calling him. He never wants to play with us.

I wish I could climb to the top. But how?

A horse, Father. I want a horse. Will you get me one?

A horse? One doesn't need a horse to look after the yaks. What would my little Tenzing do with a horse? Come, there's work to do.

I would travel. I want to see the world. I would go to the highest point, to Chomolungma... to Everest.

But the world had to wait. Some years later, the yaks, which had provided for our family for so long, slowly began to die.

The herd, that had grown to 300 or 400 and brought us prosperity, dwindled over time.

My father was soon out of work, and I had to work for a local yak herder to help my father to pay off his debts until...

I'll miss you both.

I was about thirteen when I left home. I just could not wait to explore the world any longer.

I met up with some travellers and went to the city of Kathmandu. The sights and sounds and smells were almost overwhelming. I wanted to see more. I needed to see more.

But I was still just a young boy. So after two weeks of wandering through the city...

...I returned home along with some other travellers heading for Khumbu.

Five years passed, but I never forgot my experiences in Kathmandu and how the world seemed so exciting.

In those five years, I heard more stories about mountain climbing from the Sherpas.

The rumours are true, I tell you. They are planning to go to Chomolungma again, next year. It will leave from India, from--

Hey, did I hear you mention Chomolungma?

Yes, Tenzing. The British are going there. They will be hiring Sherpas in Darjeeling. Pay will be good. We are planning to go there in a few weeks.

There were many reasons to leave – adventure, money, and... love. Her name was Dawa Phuti. She was the daughter of a Sherpa from the Khumbu region of Nepal. She loved me, but her father did not approve of me.

My daughter and that poor Tibetan... no, never! He will never be anything more than a servant.

I think her father wanted a more appropriate suitor for his daughter.

But she had a mind of her own.

When do you leave for Darjeeling?

Today.

There were twelve of us who left that day. Dawa and I hoped to marry, but first I had to find work to be able to support a family.

I wondered whether the lama's prediction of great things would really come true.

I reached Darjeeling in time for the 1933 expedition. I even cut my hair and tried my best to fit in.

Those of you who have climbed with the British before can follow me. The rest of you can go home.

But the expedition jobs went to Sherpas with experience or those from well-known families. Experience and prestige were the very things I lacked.

I tried asking an experienced Sherpa for help.

Why don't you vouch for me? They might let me come if--

You're too young, Tenzing. Why don't you go back home to Khumbu?

I even approached the expedition members privately at their club. But I couldn't speak English, so it was difficult to convince them to give me a chance.

I'm not sure what you want, my boy. No more jobs this season. Go away.

Instead of being in the expedition, I saw it leave without me.

So, I started taking whatever work I could find in Darjeeling. I even worked as a cow herder.

I stayed on in Darjeeling till the summer of 1934, when my life took an unexpected turn.

Tenzing? Is that you, Tenzing?

I've just come from Khumbu. Where have you been? Your parents think you're dead.

There was an earthquake a few months back, which destroyed our village and damaged many homes.

I immediately went back to my parents. I helped them to repair their home, worked on the fields, and tended to the yaks.

Base of Mt Everest. March 1953.

How long will you stay, Tenzing?

The months passed by, the summer turned to fall, and I again started getting impatient. I was reminded of why I had left the first time.

It broke my heart, but I left for Darjeeling again without telling anyone. I don't think my parents ever understood my thirst for adventure.

A thirst for adventure, huh? That is something that I do understand. I understand it all too well, Tenzing.

I was born on 20th July 1919, in Auckland, New Zealand. I had an older sister, June, and a younger brother, Rex.

Edmund, you will not waste food in this house. You're lucky to have it, while there are millions starving in Asia.

My parents, Percival Hillary and Gertrude Clark, moved to Tuakau when my father took a job setting up a newspaper, *The Tuakau District News*.

While I was growing up, all I wanted was adventure. We didn't have a lot of money, so all our adventure came from the occasional movie that we saw.

Yeaaahhh!!!

Yeah!

I remember I once stole a coin from my father while he was sleeping, to buy a comic book.

I dreamt of swordfights and journeys to far off lands. In those brief moments, I was the hero, and I was special.

Where did you get the money to buy this, Edmund? Answer me!

I found it... on the ground.

I decided then that some adventures weren't worth the risk. I was lucky that my mother didn't tell my father, and I never dared to steal again.

I was so absorbed in life outside of Tuakau that it kept me from making any friends.

Hey, Edmund! Do you want to come with us to--

He won't come. He is not interested.

Though it was hard for me to make friends when I was young, it became impossible when I grew older.

But I was doing well in school. I managed to jump two grades of primary school, thanks to my mother's tutoring.

My mother enrolled me into Auckland Grammar School, one of the best schools in New Zealand.

It meant I began grammar school two years earlier, at the age of eleven.

And that did not allow me to know any of the other children. I was so much younger than the other students, and I don't think anyone was interested in me. I was a--

Puny little runt. Not very athletic, are you? We'll have to find another class for you, because you won't make it in this one.

I was nothing but an outcast.

The only good part of my day was the journey to and from my school in Auckland – two hours each way that I commuted for years.

The train would leave Tuakau at 7 am, and I would get back home only after 6 pm.

I spent four hours every day just dreaming and losing myself in stories of great men on grand adventures. I became so engrossed that I soon started reading a book a day.

I also spent a lot of my time helping my father at his new job of a beekeeper.

We've got 1600 beehives to tend to, and it will be dark soon. Faster boys!

Faster? We're already working seven days a week and are exhausted. We can't move any faster.

My father had taken up beekeeping as a hobby only a few years back. So, when he resigned from his newspaper job, and we moved back to Auckland, he turned beekeeping into a full-time business.

When I turned sixteen, I was hardly the scrawny young lad that I had been earlier. I guess it was the combination of a late growth spurt and lifting forty-five-kilogram crates of honey every day which helped.

But I was still craving for an adventure...

Soon I was to have my very first adventure.

My class is having a skiing party at Mt Ruapehu, Dad. I've never done skiing before and would like to go. If I go by train, it wouldn't cost much.

Thankfully, my father agreed to let me go.

I spent ten glorious days trekking up and down the terrain, skiing down the slopes, breathing in the icy air, and feeling the snow in my fingers.

It was my first real adventure – the first thing I'd experienced for myself and not through a book or a movie.

I didn't know in what capacity, but I knew then that I wanted an adventurous life.

But my parents had other plans for me.

And what a beautiful sight awaited me!

Snow! I've never seen anything like it!

It was midnight when I touched snow for the first time.

He should just work full-time with me as a beekeeper.

But I want Edmund to continue his education. He can go to the University of Auckland and--

And what about the honey season? I need him here to help me!

Since vacation at the university coincided with the honey season, they decided I would go to college to study Maths and Science, and work at home on vacations.

My father even contributed some money for me to take the bus instead of walking eight kilometres every day to the university.

But instead of taking the bus, I would jog to the university every day, saving my fare to learn boxing and jujitsu.

In college, it was the same old story. I once again had no friends, no one I could relate to. After being two years in college, when I had failed in every exam...

...I was allowed to drop out and return to the family farm.

I enjoyed honey farming because it kept me outdoors. But I still craved something more... something more adventurous...

In 1939, when I was only twenty, I took a short trip to New Zealand's Southern Alps with a friend.

Did you really climb Mt Cook? How long did it take you?

It must have been treacherous getting to the top. What was the weather like?

For the first time, I saw some real climbers. They had just climbed the top of Mt Cook, which at 3,754 metres, was New Zealand's highest peak.

They were real climbers having real adventures. I was impressed. I decided then and there that I would take up mountaineering.

My friend and I immediately got a guide and set out to tackle Mt Oliver, a small peak, but nevertheless a challenge for a new climber.

Slow down, Edmund. There's no need to rush.

The view is magnificent, almost indescribable. Oh, this is the happiest day of my life!

At only 698 metres, Mt Oliver was hardly a challenge when compared to Mt Cook. But it was real mountaineering. And I promised myself that I would not stop, and would climb Mt Cook, too, some day.

My plans for Mt Cook, however, had to wait. For, when World War II broke out in 1939, I applied to join the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

We already have a lot of new recruits waiting. It could be a year before you are called for training.

But one year changed to many, and I kept waiting to be called.

Honey production is also important during the war. I need you here, Ed.

I was finally called to service in 1944. Thankfully, I fared better in my training than I had done at the university.

Fourteenth out of 260 students. Not a bad showing, soldier.

While training, I spent my weekends climbing mountains near the military base.

Don't you ever rest, Ed? It's weekend. Why don't you just relax? We do enough hiking when we're training anyway.

I often climbed from sunrise till sunset, and sometimes found it difficult to find my way back down.

I even reached the top of Tapuaenuku, New Zealand's fourth highest mountain, which was about 2,885 metres high. And I did it all in a single day.

After about a year of basic training and learning navigation, I was first sent to Fiji in February 1945, followed by the Solomon Islands, and then to Halavo base near Guadalcanal.

I was trained to patrol the water for search and rescue missions. Since the war was almost at an end, there wasn't much to patrol, and I spent most of my time waiting for something to happen.

I'm bored, Ed. Want to hunt for a crocodile?

There's an abandoned motorboat at the dock, Ed. Let's check how fast it goes.

Ron Ward – a kindred spirit always game for anything – was my partner in crime while I was stationed at Halavo.

We had taken the boat several times before without any incident. That morning, we took the boat to drop an airman off at an American base a few miles away at Tulagi.

ED!!!

BOOM!

But on our way back to Halavo, the gas tank broke loose. What started as a small fire was suddenly out of control...

...and as I dived into safety, a rough wave made me lose my balance and sent me reeling straight into the fire. Somehow I managed to roll off the engine and into the water.

The boat drifted a bit farther out before it exploded, leaving us stranded in the water.

We're almost there, Ed. Keep moving.

We somehow managed to reach nearby Tanenhoga Island. Two American soldiers took us back to Tulagi, to the US Naval hospital there.

Despite falling right on top of the burning engine, I had only suffered second-degree burns.

And after three weeks in the hospital...

...I was sent home to Auckland. I was eager to return to my normal life on the family farm. And also to what I loved... the mountains.

My father had, meanwhile, hired some workers and claimed he no longer needed my help.

So, I went trekking through New Zealand's Southern Alps until I was called back.

We have had a very bad harvest this year, Son. I had to let my employees go. I could do with your help.

I had no option but to help my family.

And when the honey season slowed down, I was allowed to take vacations.

I was able to continue with my passion for climbing, even returning to Tapuaenuku with my brother, Rex.

Y-y-you... huff... actually c-c-climbed all this in one day?

I then started climbing every mountain I could find in New Zealand and Australia.

Mt Everest. 1953.

While climbing the mountains Aiguille Rouge and Haidinger in 1946, I was lucky to meet Harry Ayres, one of New Zealand's best mountain guides and top climbers.

I took full advantage of his experience.

Have you ever climbed Mt Cook, Harry? I have always wanted to climb it.

Mt Cook? You know, I was supposed to go as a guide there but that was cancelled. If you are interested, we can go there together.

I spent three climbing seasons with Ayres and learnt the subtleties of ice and snow climbing from him. But I guess you were already a veteran climber by that time, Tenzing.

Yes, I had scaled a few peaks by 1946. My first real shot was way back in 1935...

I had moved to Darjeeling by then after marrying Dawa Phuti. Her father had disowned her as he still believed I would go nowhere in life.

And by the end of spring 1935, it was starting to look that way.

The Sherpas required for this year's expedition have already been taken. You can all go home. There is no more work this season.

I could not speak English and had no certificate from the Himalayan Club to prove I was an experienced Sherpa – which I could never be if I didn't get my first job.

Wait a moment. I think I can use two more Sherpas.

The expedition leader was Eric Shipton, and he decided to make the final list of Sherpas who would join him.

You. You can step out of the line.

I think Shipton liked my smile and decided to give me a chance.

Stop! Don't leave! Can someone explain to him that he's been chosen for the expedition?

Tenzing, stop!

The 1935 expedition was only a reconnaissance for a later attempt. And the Sherpas were only required to climb high enough to drop off the supplies for the British climbers.

To all the Sherpas, it was just a job that paid twelve annas a day. But, if they had to go above the snow line, where the climbing is more dangerous and ice is present throughout the year, a higher rate of one rupee a day was paid.

So for me, with my wife pregnant, it was a dream come true.

I was issued my gear for the first time. I was carrying about forty kilograms near the base of the mountain, and twenty-five kilograms higher up.

Though I had no formal training, I just kept my eyes open and absorbed everything I could.

It was a small expedition, but one which kept me from becoming one nameless Sherpa amid hundreds.

Nice work, Tenzing.

When heavy rains forced us to turn back, I had already climbed higher than 6,700 metres.

My son, Nima Dorje, was born while I was away. I was now not only a certified Sherpa, but also a father.

Luckily, I didn't have to wait too long to find work again. Shipton returned in the spring of 1936 as part of a larger expedition led by Hugh Ruttledge, and I was taken on.

I can't see a thing! Turn back! There's no sense in waiting around for an avalanche.

Two Everest climbs and two failures. But as a Sherpa, I was starting to cement my reputation.

Good to be out of that storm, isn't it? What's next for you, Tenzing?

I'm going to Garhwal and could use some skilled climbers with me.

Over the next couple of years, I was busy with various expeditions to different mountains, and I also earned money by guiding tourists around. But I was always looking for an opportunity to return to Everest.

But Sherpas were flooding Darjeeling for work. That coupled with the shrinking size of the expeditions, made it difficult for most of the Sherpas to get work.

In 1938, a small expedition was to be led by Bill Tilman...

We can only take twelve Sherpas this time, Eric. We've got a quarter of the budget.

I've worked with Tenzing Norgay, Bill. We should definitely take him on this one.

During that expedition, we stopped at the Rongbuk monastery on 6th April for the lama's blessings.

My father came down from Khumbu to wish me well as the monastery was just eight kilometres away from my village.

Though Bill Tilman was the expedition leader, I was climbing with Eric Shipton. But irrespective of who the leader was, we kept facing endless setbacks.

While trying to get supplies up to our fifth camp, two Sherpas collapsed due to high altitude and heavy loads.

The Sherpas had to abandon the tents and supplies and make their way back down the mountain.

Without those supplies, we're finished. I don't think anyone here has any strength left to climb down to retrieve the supplies and then climb back up again.

It was July, and we were then at our fifth campsite, almost 7,000 metres above sea level.

Tenzing! Wait!!

Realising the urgency, I decided to go down and retrieve the supplies myself.

I'm not sure how long it took me to head down the mountain and get those supplies up.

What I do know is that I lost my footing at one point trying to manage the heavy loads, and nearly went tumbling back down.

It was almost dark by the time I finally returned to the camp.

To me, the risk was worth it. With those supplies, we were able to set up the sixth campsite the next day, and the climbing team later made an attempt for the top.

Though that expedition ultimately failed, but for my effort, I was awarded a Tiger Medal, an honour given to Sherpas who climbed the highest.

Is there anything you can't do on a mountain, Tenzing?

I thought my reputation would guarantee me another chance at Everest next year. But unfortunately...

...because of World War II, all expeditions were on hold.

There's no work here in Darjeeling. I need to go and find some work. I'll be back soon.

My family was now growing larger. I now not only had a son, Nima Dorje, and daughter, Pem Pem, but also a third baby, which was on its way.

I started working as a private mountain guide again. I also got acquainted to E H White, an Irish soldier based in Chitral.

My friend has recommended you. He once climbed with you. Would you be interested in working as my assistant?

I had only been in Chitral a few months when the terrible news arrived.

My son is dead!

Oh, no! Tenzing, I'm so sorry. If you need anything...

My son, having drunk polluted water, had died of dysentry. My wife by now had given birth to a girl, Nima.

I decided to take everyone back with me to Chitral, where work, at least, was guaranteed.

Time did not ease the grief as my wife too fell ill.

She could not adjust to the Indian climate and subsequently got weaker and weaker, until she passed away a few years later in 1944.

Where are we going, Daddy?

We're going home, Pem.

Home. That was the only thing that mattered now. I wanted to take my daughters back to Darjeeling.

But, with the war still going on, going to Darjeeling was not easy.

Please! I have to get on this train.

Wait, I've been waiting since morning!

This is a military train. For officers only. Now, please step aside and let the officer through.

I need to go to Darjeeling!

...had I not remembered an old military uniform E H White had given me as a gift.

We waited for days to get on the train. There's no telling how much longer the wait would have been...

First class passage straight to Darjeeling. Enjoy your journey, sir.

Daddy, are you an officer?

I returned to Darjeeling, and got married to Ang Lhamu in 1945. She, too, was from Khumbu.

With my family now settled, I once again returned to my real calling – the mountains.

Spring, 1947.

I'm not sure I understand you correctly, Mr...

Denman. Earl Denman. I'm not part of a climbing team, Tenzing.

I want to climb Everest... but all on my own. I just need a Sherpa or two. So, will you and Ang Dawa come with me?

It was probably a crazy idea in the first place without proper food or clothing.

Denman hadn't even got permission to cross the border into Tibet, which put us all at great risk if we were caught.

But I guess it was too exciting an adventure to pass up.

But the excitement quickly faded.

The wind is not only tearing through our tent, but also our clothing.

I'm f-f-freezing. C-c-can't f-f-feel a thing.

We were just three men attempting to do what massive expeditions could not. It was starting to seem impossible.

We made it to about 7,000 metres up, almost till the North Col. But it was pointless to simply press on when the mountain won't allow you to.

Let's climb further up. Wait for another day or two. Another--

Now! We must turn back now!

I know, Tenzing. Lead the way.

We were just three men with no supplies or support. We had nothing slowing us down as we fled to safety.

The lack of men, something that worked against us on our attempt to climb the mountain, aided us now on our retreat.

Though I earned a modest amount of money for only a few weeks of work, I turned down Denman's request to try again in 1948.

I couldn't afford to take such foolish chances. At the same time, however, I also couldn't afford to slow down and signed up for another expedition just a day after I returned to Darjeeling.

25th June 1947.
Kedarnath Mountain.

I agreed to join the Swiss on an expedition to India's Garhwal region.

We were planning to climb some of the more moderate Himalayan mountains, starting with Kedarnath.

It was about 2,000 metres smaller than Everest, but the peak was still a challenge... a challenge which I wouldn't get to experience.

You'd like to be up there with them trying for the summit. Wouldn't you, Tenzing?

For this time, I had came as a personal assistant to a female climber, Mrs Annelies Lohner.

And since she wasn't climbing to the top of the summit, I had to stay behind with her further down the mountain.

So I wasn't there when Wangdi Norbu, the head Sherpa of the expedition, lost his footing and fell.

Sahib!!!

I've got you! Just hold on Wangdi!

Alfred Sutter tried to pull him up, but his axe became loose...

...and both men tumbled more than 300 metres down the mountain.

Later that night.

What happened?!

Alfred and Wangdi fell down, Tenzing. Alfred here is fine, but Wangdi is in bad shape, he can't even walk.

We couldn't carry him back, so we set up a tent for him. We'll get him in the morning.

We set out at first light. The team was all exhausted.

It took us three hours to reach Wangdi. Shaken from the fall, he was convinced he would die on the mountain.

I see the tent! It's straight ahead!

They needed fresh legs to take the lead. And I wasn't going to leave an old friend to his death.

We finally got Wangdi off the mountain and ensured he was fine.

Did you really think I wouldn't come after you, my old friend?

Thank you, Tenzing, for saving me.

Just weeks later, in early July, we tried for the summit of Kedarnath again, but this time, I was the head Sherpa.

It was my first peak of a large mountain. And with my reputation growing, I started getting offers as head Sherpa.

There was no giving up. There was no turning back.

Nanga Parbat. November 1950.

Give up, Tenzing! We have to turn back! The Sahibs will only lead you to your death, if you follow them.

Nanga Parbat was also called Killer Mountain, for over the years twenty-nine climbers had already perished there.

I fear the Sherpas are right, Dick. It's too dangerous to continue. I wouldn't advise you to climb further. Please reconsider.

With winter approaching, our porters had abandoned the expedition, leaving me with just three Sherpas and three British climbers, Bill Crace, Jim Thornley, and Dick Marsh.

But Dick Marsh did not pay heed to my warning. He climbed further with Crace and Thornley.

After two days in the freezing cold, Dick Marsh returned to the base camp where we were waiting.

There's no sign of Crace or Thornley or their tents.

Something must have happened to them. I'll go up myself. I just can't abandon them. You wait here.

But I couldn't just wait. So we all climbed up the mountain in search of them until we couldn't climb any more and were forced to descend.

And then we made another rescue attempt with more men. The weather had worsened, and we still found no trace of them or their camp.

It was another tragedy.

Two climbers were lost again on my next climb on Nanda Devi with the French in the summer of 1951. Roger Duplat and Gilbert Vignes were last seen approaching the summit of Nanda Devi.

It's been almost a week. There is still no sign of Duplat and Vignes.

Climber Louis Dubost and I made a rescue effort to search for the climbers, but to no avail.

And disasters followed me again while climbing Kang Peak. I was with a Swiss climber by the name of James Frey.

He suddenly slipped. I even broke my finger trying to grab him as he fell past me.

There was tragedy and death on every expedition. Maybe these things existed off the mountains as well...

Mount Everest. 1953.

Maybe this expedition will give us a lot of good fortune.

So tell me Ed, did you climb to the top of Mt Cook?

Oh yes, in 1947, I first climbed one of the peaks of Mt Cook with Harry Ayres. This mountain has three peaks, of which South Ridge is considered the most challenging.

So the following year, Harry and I set out with a couple of other climbers to conquer the South Ridge.

I'm not quite sure how we get up to the top of that ledge.

Or how we get back down if we do.

We understood why the South Ridge had not been conquered till then.

I can't reach the ledge, Ed. I'm still not high enough to pull myself up. Do you have any other ideas?

I think if I can just wedge my axe into this crack tight enough, Harry, you can probably reach the next ledge climbing on this.

Why don't you step on my hand and jump to the ledge?

At a few thousand metres up, staying balanced while jumping from my hand was not a joke. A slip could have meant death.

Harry realised it was our only option.

And it worked. So, Harry and I kept on. At a height of 3,593 metres, Cook's South Ridge peak was actually 150 metres lower than our previous climb.

But it was a challenging climb and more satisfying since no one had climbed it before. I no longer followed a path made by other climbers; I was now creating a path for them.

I must say I was quite content. Rex and I were happy running my father's business, which gave us plenty of time for climbing.

It's from Mum. They're still in England for our sister June's wedding. She says they're going to stay there a bit and travel. She wants to know if I'll come and drive them around so they can see all the sights.

Don't tell me you're considering travelling through Europe with our parents?

Why not? This could be my chance to climb the Alps.

Thanks to my mother, I got a chance to climb the Alps, through Austria and Switzerland, tackling five 4,000-metre peaks in five days.

Then something unexpected changed the course of my life.

I had returned to New Zealand for the honey season. It was around the same time that I met George Lowe.

Being a fellow New Zealander, and a climbing companion who also had his father in the beekeeping business, Lowe and I obviously bonded immediately.

That was **all** the encouragement I needed.

Hey Ed? Ever thought about climbing the Himalayas?

You said it was a large group travelling to the Himalayas, George.

They dropped out. They said it was too expensive. Isn't that right, Earle?

Forget them. We'll move faster with a smaller group. Now what do we tackle first, Cotter? I suggest we try to reach the peak of Mukut Parbat first.

So it was just the four of us – myself, George Lowe, Ed Cotter, and Earle Riddiford.

We left New Zealand in May 1951 and climbed peak after peak, from 5,000 metres to a high of 6,760 metres. And in the middle of our expedition...

Did you see this, Ed? It came with our mail. There's going to be another Everest expedition. And Shipton is leading it.

I just couldn't believe it. Eric Shipton was one of my climbing heroes. I had read about his experiences of climbing Nanda Devi. He was a real life adventurer, with loads of determination.

I wrote to Shipton offering our services. And weeks later...

Are you from the New Zealand expedition team? I've got a letter here for you.

It's from Eric. He says we can join him on Everest! We have to bring our own supplies and pay for our way to get there, but we can join him! We can all--

Not all. Shipton had room for only two of us. Which two it would be was left to us. I had very little money left to get myself to Everest, but George had even less than me.

Good luck, my friend. I'll see you and Earle back in New Zealand after you've scaled the top of Everest.

September 1951. Mt Everest Base Camp.

Earle and I were ecstatic about climbing Everest, even though it was only a reconnaissance mission.

Nepal's borders had been closed for centuries, so every expedition to Everest was attempted from the northern side, through Tibet. But in 1950, Tibet's border was closed by the Chinese, while Nepal reopened theirs.

The southern side of Everest was unexplored and regarded as a treacherous route... but it was our only option now.

We had been climbing for a few weeks when we were stranded due to an icefall. On 4th October, I set out with Shipton, Riddiford, Pasang, and one of the Sherpas, to find a way past the icefall.

We were camped at 5,334 metres and were trying to climb another 1,000 metres. I don't think Shipton was expecting to get very far as we had carried only seventeen days of supplies from our base camp.

We knew the ice could crack at any time...

...and we witnessed it firsthand when the ice beneath our feet started to break loose and sent us reeling.

The snow and ice suddenly started sliding off the mountain, and we dived for higher ground.

Had it not been for our practice of tying ourselves together and climbing...

Aaaaaa!

...Riddiford would have certainly fallen to his death.

We couldn't risk climbing higher with the snow like that, so we decided to go back and return later.

When we returned to the icefall two weeks later in mid-October...

There's no trace of the route we took. Not even a footprint. The ice has changed completely.

Still we pressed on for another week and a half. But unfortunately...

This massive crevasse is splitting the entire glacier in half. How do we cross it?

We can't, at least, not with the supplies we have now. We will have to come back again next year. Let's turn back.

Mt Everest. 1953.

But we didn't get a chance in 1952.

Nepal allowed only one country access to the mountain each year, and 1952 was reserved by the Swiss.

Yes, I know, because they asked me to join them as their *sirdar*.

I had a dreadful time hiring Sherpas for that expedition.

The British didn't pay our full salary last year. The Swiss might do the same!

The southern route can't be climbed! It's too dangerous.

Even Ang Tharkay, who was the *sirdar* in Eric Shipton's 1951 attempt, refused to come.

The glacier just splits in half, Tenzing.

I'll bet you twenty rupees you will get no further than I did last year, Tenzing.

I took Ang Tharkay's bet as a challenge and finally managed to recruit the Sherpas we needed.

From Kathmandu we began the long journey to Everest. Since we were taking the southern route, we crossed Khumbu where I had lived as a boy.

TENZING!!!

I hadn't seen my mother since I left home eighteen years ago. She had heard about us passing through, and had come to meet me.

But there was little time for a reunion. I had been hired to do a job – to help the climbers reach the top of Everest.

Only the Sherpas carrying food will climb up to the next camp!

Anyone carrying tents or other nonessential gear will head out with the second and third teams.

Keep moving! Fast! It's already April. We have to be up the mountain and back down before the monsoon arrives.

As a *sirdar*, I had to monitor the travel between the camps, help the Sherpas and porters bring up 2,500 kilograms of gear, and keep everything organised.

Can you see that? It is a crossing point just wide enough to get us to the other side.

I was climbing twice as much as everyone else, even making a few trips across that impassable crevasse... once we found a way to cross it.

J J Asper, the youngest member of the expedition, was lowered down to the crossing point eighteen metres below the top of the crevasse.

And from there, Asper was able to climb up to the other side of the crevasse and secure enough ropes to let us set up a stable crossing point.

Having proven my skill and strength at high altitudes, I was also called upon to help the team carve out the route to reach the summit.

Hey, Raymond! This Tenzing here never slows down. He must have a third lung.

Good. That means more oxygen for the rest of us.

Raymond Lambert had lost all his toes to frostbite while climbing in the Alps in 1938, but still hadn't given up on the mountains.

Maybe that's why Lambert and I bonded so quickly and worked so well together.

And maybe that's why we were the chosen two to climb to the summit.

By mid-May, we were camped at 6,900 metres. Still a long way from the top, we knew we weren't close enough to try for the summit yet.

Two Swiss climbers and six Sherpas were climbing with me and Lambert. We tried to save all of our oxygen, as we were unsure whether it was possible to breathe at the higher altitudes.

Just keep moving! The weather might get worse if we wait for more supplies.

One by one, our team of ten started succumbing to exhaustion.

Sherpa Ajiba was the first to fall sick and went back. Ang Norbu and Mingma Dorje were next to collapse due to exhaustion.

By the time we reached our final camp at 8,382 metres, only the Swiss climbers Rene Aubert and Leon Flory remained.

There's only one tent and hardly any oxygen or food left.

It's best if we go down. The two of you will have a better chance at reaching the top without us.

The supplies we had carried did not include a stove, so we used a small candle to melt some snow for water.

I don't care about the s-s-stove. Just wish we had our s-s-sleeping bags. We'll probably f-f-freeze to death if we fall asleep without them.

We hoped we would get better weather in the morning.

We didn't. But still we pressed on.

28th May 1952.

Our oxygen tanks only worked when we stood still, and we could not afford to stand still. So we were forced to abandon them and took turns leading the way without oxygen.

We were about 250 metres below the peak, the highest anyone had reached on Everest so far. But climbing the last 200 metres had taken us five hours.

We thought we had a chance to reach the summit. But with no sleep, food, water, or oxygen...

...we knew we would never make it back down alive if we did.

By the time we descended a few hundred metres to return to the camp, the exhaustion that had claimed others finally ravaged the two of us.

Quick! Get some hot water or tea! And bring more oxygen!

Rene Dittert, one of the expedition leaders, sent another team of climbers for a second attempt. Beaten back by the weather and altitude sickness, they returned just days later. So, there was only one thing left for us to do...

You're a madman! You just got back from Everest a few weeks ago. What do you mean you're going again?

If the Swiss don't make another attempt in the fall, they might not get a second chance. I have to go with them. This is what I want, Ang. This is my life!

Mt Everest. Autumn 1952.

I was not only brought back as *sirdar*, but also as a member of the climbing team.

We have to reach our next campsite before dark! Keep moving!

Still making good use of that third lung, I see.

This time we carried more supplies, more food, long logs, and ladders to help us cross the crevasses. And once again, my dear friend Raymond Lambert was part of the climbing team.

Nothing was going to stop us this time. Not even an...

Avalanche!!!

I remember I was at one of the lower camps when the avalanche hit.

A team was then trying to reach the South Col, and a piece of falling ice took the life of Mingma Dorje, one of the Sherpas. He was a good Sherpa. He had climbed beside me on the spring expedition until he couldn't climb any further.

And now, he would never leave Everest.

Tenzing, we can't ask the Sherpas to continue. If anyone wants to leave, they can.

Gabriel Chevally was the expedition leader. After Mingma Dorje's death, he didn't want to risk the lives of the other Sherpas.

But apart from those who were injured, none left. I guess we all stayed for the same reason – to conquer Everest.

We tried to find a safer route, but soon October became November. And autumn turned to winter. The days got shorter and the daylight started fading.

Do you think anything can survive this high up?

I guess that answers my question.

We were running out of time.

This time we couldn't reach as high as our spring attempt. The temperature was −30°, and the winds were getting stronger by the day.

We abandoned most of our gear and tried to get off the mountain as quickly as possible. This was not what we had planned for.

The British will be making their attempt next year. With your experience, the British will probably ask you to be their *sirdar* too.

No. We will climb Everest together. We will--

But you should go, Tenzing. Will you take my scarf with you? If I can't climb again, at least a part of me might make it to the summit. Take it. And you must take the chance.

I was completely worn out after I took the two expeditions that year. Suffering from malaria, I became twenty pounds underweight. The Swiss flew me to a hospital in India for treatment.

There is some mail for you today, Tenzing.

It was from the British expedition team. They wanted me to join them.

Lambert was right. The offer was not only for the role of a *sirdar* but also as a member of the climbing team. But to consider a third climb so soon would be...

January 1953.

Lunacy, I know. I spent ten days in the hospital and I'm still worn out. But I have to do it. I can't stop.

I trained for a couple of months; I cut out on alcohol and smoking, and began hiking the countryside every day...

Father, will you take my pencil and put it on top of the mountain?

Of course, Nima, I will.

...and I was back there again on 1st March.

Mt Everest. 1953.

You know, I almost did not come for this expedition. I wasn't sure I wanted to handle all the stress of being a *sirdar* again.

Did you know even I was almost not invited? The British were debating about going with a new team, and as New Zealanders, George Lowe and I would then have been out.

But some of the British climbers, with whom I had climbed before, refused to go without me.

There'll be time for chatting later, gentlemen. We've got a mountain to climb.

Yes, John, of course.

The man in charge of this massive Everest expedition was Colonel John Hunt, a much decorated war veteran who had climbed mountains in the Himalayas several times before.

We shall first scout around and get used to the high altitudes. Then we'll take turns in cutting steps in the ice and leading the way. Depending on the weather, we will climb for a few weeks to get acclimatised.

Then we will test our oxygen tanks, and if they are all working properly, we'll make our attempt for the summit.

Hunt had got the best climbing team together, and now he had to plan the climb.

The Swiss had taken this route when they attempted to climb Mt Everest last year. We might have a better chance of success if we follow that route.

Tom Bourdillon, Charles Evans, George Lowe, and Alf Gregory were part of the climbing team.

Alf was to be the photographer on the expedition.

You better save some of that film for when we reach the peak, Alfred.

Not to mention my strength. I'm not as young as George Band over there. He is sixteen years younger than I am – such a young kid.

All four men had scaled the Alps and the Himalayas before and were technically and physically prepared for any obstacle.

At twenty-two, George Band was the youngest member of the climbing team. There were other experienced mountaineers like Wilfrid Noyce, Michael Westmacott, and Michael Ward, who was the medical officer on the expedition.

Don't be ashamed of your youth, George. Your young bones will heal faster if you get caught in an icefall.

I guarantee that won't happen. The dehydration will get to all of you long before the ice cracks.

Dr Griffith Pugh, a physiologist, was also travelling with the climbing team.

He had researched extreme conditions extensively and had calculated the amount of oxygen and nutrition the team would need.

And cameraman Thomas Stobart would be documenting the entire climb. He would take a live action account of the expedition in addition to Alf.

But dehydration won't be exciting to catch on film.

And there was also Charles Wylie, a climber fluent in Nepali – Nepal's local language.

<John said he's ready to keep moving. Can you inform all the Sherpas?>

But an expedition was still incomplete without the Sherpas. Especially men like Da Namgyal, Ang Tempa, and Pemba.

The expedition left Kathmandu on 10th March 1953, and reached Thyangboche Monastery after about seventeen days.

But they began their ascent only in April after the team had got adjusted to the high altitude and had tested out their equipments.

On 9th April, Edmund Hillary set off from the monastery with fifty climbers, Sherpas, and porters, looking for a location for their first camp before the rest of the team would join them.

The terrain was ever changing, and the weather was highly unpredictable.

We'll never get past this ice wall. We'd better turn back, and find another route.

Obstacles blocking their path kept forcing them to look for another route, which meant loss of an hour or, sometimes, even a day.

What do you think, Ed?

I swear this crevasse sprung up overnight. It was solid ice yesterday. I don't think we can cross this.

I agree, George. There's no way we can get past this. Let's turn back.

The snowfall kept covering their tracks. They had to be cautious, to make sure that their route through the ice was safe for an army of explorers to cross.

Everyone, turn back. We'll have to find another route.

You brought only one ladder? Do you have any idea how many crevasses we have to cross?

While Hillary was attempting to climb higher, Tenzing's role as *sirdar* kept him below to manage the supply lines.

We need long logs or poles to set up secure bridges at every crossing point.

To set up bridges, we would need to hire more men.

John Hunt wanted his expedition to reach the top, but equally important was the safety of his team members. So he decided to hire some Sherpas to bring up the wood.

A couple of more logs, quick. I want them tied up within the hour.

He even planned days off the mountain, to allow his team to recover from the brutal environment...

...at a place called Lobuje, which was a 2.5-hour trek away, below Base Camp.

By 26th April, the supply lines were operating smoothly. The expedition had reached the Western Cwm, and they were now planning their fourth campsite.

The lead group of climbers was now climbing in pairs for safety, and for the first time in the expedition, Tenzing found himself tethered to Edmund Hillary.

Leabharlanna Chonndae

The entire team took turns tackling the hardest of tasks, carving a route through the frozen ice for the rest of the expedition to follow.

Why don't you let me take the lead for a while?

I am actually looking for provisions. When I had come with the Swiss last year, we had abandoned some here.

Wow! Biscuits, jam, cheese, and bacon! That's great, Tenzing! These seem more precious than oxygen.

Despite being outwardly supportive, each man privately craved the chance to reach the summit first. It's the reason why they were there.

Hillary wanted to reach the top with his friend George Lowe.

I think I spotted a crossing point just past that ridge. We should check it out.

But being a British expedition, it was unlikely that the two New Zealanders would be paired together.

Hillary was happy to be paired with Tenzing, and eventually, they began to see great strength and determination in each other.

Can we make this jump? What do you think?

They wondered if they could make a formidable team, a team that would get an opportunity to attack the summit.

They worked well together, trying to push past every obstacle before them. But at times, things did not work their way.

One day, on their way to Base Camp, Hillary attempted to leap over another small crevasse, one no larger or more dangerous than what they had already encountered.

But a part of the challenges of Everest is that what seems like a safe route one moment can prove to be the most dangerous moments later.

And that is exactly what happened. The icy landing point split right through as Hillary's feet made contact.

Tenzing! Help!

Without wasting a moment, Tenzing drove his axe into the snow, wound the rope around the axe, and quickly pulled the rope tight.

I've got the rope, Ed. Are you okay?

I'm holding on, Tenzing. Don't let go.

I guess this isn't a route we can recommend to others.

No, maybe not.

But thanks for saving me, Tenzing.

They did make a formidable pair together. And they were determined that the rest of the expedition would see that as well.

Some days later.

John Hunt needs someone to test out the oxygen systems. Do you feel like joining me on another adventure, Tenzing?

Evans and Bourdillon set out to test the 'closed-circuit system' that allowed climbers to breathe pure oxygen from an oxygen tank. The system also recycled the air breathed out, and helped to reuse the oxygen exhaled. John Hunt also went as part of their team.

Meanwhile, Hillary and Tenzing volunteered to test the 'open-circuit system' that mixed the oxygen with the surrounding air. The air here was kept in a tank and forced through the oxygen mask at a continuous set rate as decided by the climber.

They decided to climb from Base Camp to Camp IV, and back to Base Camp in a single day, which without oxygen, was a full two-day trip.

Let's wait and see how John and the others did.

They left Base Camp at 6.30 am and reached Camp IV at 11.30 am.

The closed system is heavy, but it worked well. I think it might allow us to move faster towards the summit.

Both of you should hurry and get back to Base Camp before it gets dark.

Yes, let's get moving, Tenzing.

I wish I could see what was in front of me.

Yes, but thanks to the oxygen cylinder, we can, at least, walk through this snowstorm.

It was pitch dark by the time they reached Base Camp.

Both oxygen tests were a success, and it was now time to plan the assault.

6th May 1953.

The climbers were back at Base Camp for a period of rest.

Charles? Ed? Can I see the two of you for a moment?

We've got a lot of work ahead of us.

I've been up all night putting together a list of jobs and the people they will be assigned to as we try for the summit. I'd like to run it by you to see if you have any questions.

There was only one question that everyone was eager to know...

Who will climb to the summit?

George Lowe, Mike Westmacott, and George Band will take the lead and carve the route along the Lhotse Face. I'll need Wilf Noyce, Charles Wylie, and the Sherpas to get all the gear up to the South Col.

Alf Gregory and I will take supplies up for our final camp. Da Namgyal, Ang Temba, and Pemba will stay with us till the high altitudes.

And the first attempt at the summit will be made by...

...Charles and Tom. They will climb using the closed-circuit oxygen. If they can't reach the top, the second attempt will be made by Tenzing and Ed.

I think you forgot me, John?

I'm sorry, Michael. You're our medical officer, and we'll need you if something goes wrong. You have to stay in camp and be on reserve.

In case something goes wrong... that's a positive outlook, isn't it?

With you, Tenzing, Charles, and Tom trying for the summit, we shouldn't have a thing to worry about. Congratulations, Ed.

While there was a twinge of disappointment for those who were not selected for the final attempt, but there was no resentment.

I'm sorry you weren't chosen, George. I know how much you wanted to--

It's a time to celebrate. Congratulations, Ed. I am sure you will make us proud.

11th May 1953.

Every job was crucial for success.

I guess we should get started.

The first five camps had already been established, and there were still hundreds of metres of rocks and ice to cross.

George Lowe and Ang Nyima spent more than a week chopping ice-steps to create a safe route to Camps VI and VII for others to follow.

And they did it without using oxygen.

21st May 1953.

The summit attempts would also hinge on Noyce, Wylie, and the Sherpas, for they had to get the bulk of the heavy supplies up.

I can only see Noyce and Annullu climbing past Camp VII. Where are the rest of the Sherpas? Something seems to be wrong.

We must help them!

Instead of conserving their energy, Tenzing and Hillary rushed to help their friends.

We can't climb any further. We're exhausted.

Don't worry, we're all exhausted.

But we are too close to stop now. Let us all move together.

Finally, we selected seventeen Sherpas to carry the supplies needed for the summit attempts.

Climbing without oxygen, they were all exhausted on reaching South Col. But the effort didn't stop there.

Hunt and Da Namgyal had climbed 8,336 metres high. They had taken some supplies up as high as they could.

John! What happened?!

We left our oxygen there so you and Tenzing could use it later.

Now I can hardly breathe. Just g-g-give me a m-m-minute.

While Hunt and the others were readying things for Hillary and Tenzing...

26th May 1953.

...Charles Evans and Tom Bourdillon were getting ready at Camp VIII to go up to the summit.

Are you ready to start the climb, Charles?

My oxygen system isn't working, Tom. The valves are blocked; they seem to be frozen.

Tom Bourdillon was an Oxford-educated rocket scientist, and he had invented the closed-circuit oxygen system himself.

But the equipment malfunctioned and they were able to start only at 7.30 am.

They did some fast climbing, and soon were just eighty-five vertical metres below the tip of Mt Everest.

Something still isn't right with my oxygen system. I think we should turn back, Tom.

We're so close, Charles. And my oxygen tank is working fine. Maybe I should go by myself. We're so close.

It isn't safe for you to go alone, Tom. We are exhausted, and the ridge ahead looks very formidable too. It isn't safe, Tom.

You are right, Charles. We can't climb any further. It's just that the summit seems so close, almost within our grasp.

They decided to climb down to Camp VIII. Without shelter or supplies, and with limited oxygen supply, the frigid weather had started to become intolerable.

They were so tired that they couldn't even climb down safely. They kept stumbling down with frequent slips and falls.

Thanks to the soft snow at the bottom, it saved them from any injury.

We c-c-c-couldn't do it. We were so close. I should've gone ahead by myself.

With Evans's oxygen system malfunctioning, they had lost their chance of conquering Everest. It was now left to Hillary and Tenzing to conquer the summit.

It's dangerous, Tenzing, but I think it can be climbed.

So everyone started concentrating on seeing that Tenzing and Hillary reached the top.

It looks like all the gear is in place, Ed. Is everyone ready to get you and Tenzing to the top?

Not everyone, George. Look.

As Evans and Bourdillon's physical condition was deteriorating, it was decided that they should go down.

Ang Temba had been sick, and he, too, was going down with them. To conserve supplies, they were going down without oxygen. But Tom Bourdillon collapsed as soon as they left the camp.

I'll climb down without oxygen, Ed. You should save it for your summit attempt.

Stop arguing. You need it, Tom, for you won't be able to get down without it.

The oxygen brought back life into Tom's body, but he still crawled down at a snail's pace.

Someone should go down the mountain with them. I fear they won't have the strength to navigate the treacherous ice on their own.

John Hunt was eager to help Tenzing and Hillary, but he was just as depleted as the rest.

I agree, Ed. George should lead them down the mountain.

John, you will not be able to give any physical assistance. I think you, too, should go down with them.

I put this expedition together, George. I can't abandon it when we're so close.

But when John realised that he may actually hinder the attack, he agreed to go down.

Take this. There's a crucifix inside. Please leave it on top for me.

And remember, Ed, the main thing is to get down safely. I know you will get to the top if you can. We are all counting on you two.

With that, the four tired men finally went down slowly towards Camp VII.

Hillary and Tenzing later learnt that all four men nearly perished that day.

Ang Temba fell off a snow bridge during their descent. The combined strength of Evans, Bourdillon, and Hunt wasn't enough to pull him back up.

If it had not been for Wilfrid Noyce and Michael Ward at Camp VII, the four men might not have returned safely.

Next morning, on 28th May, George Lowe, Alf Gregory, and Ang Nyima forged ahead to carve a route to the final camp.

They planned to set up one more camp as close to the summit as possible.

They left at ten in the morning, an hour after the others. They moved at a slow pace to conserve their energy.

George, Alf, and Ang must be almost there. Are you ready to head out?

Tenzing and Hillary were still at Camp VIII – at a height of 7,894 metres, still about 1,000 metres from the top.

Tenzing, look, some oxygen tanks. They must have been abandoned by your Swiss expedition last year.

We should save those for our descent. We can now safely use up our own tanks to reach the summit.

But there were also some signs that weren't quite as hopeful.

This is where I camped with Lambert last year, and we didn't make it to the summit that day.

By the time Hillary and Tenzing caught up with the support team, it was around noon and they were a little over 600 metres from the top.

Nice job carving those steps, George. You made the climb easy for us.

The five men then found the gear left by John Hunt and Da Namgyal, and carried it up for another 100 odd metres.

They were all exhausted and started looking for a suitable spot to set up Camp IX.

We can't put up the tent here. We need to keep looking.

I think there is a spot higher up. Just five minutes away.

But after five minutes...

Just a little higher. I'm positive. Five more minutes.

It took much longer than five minutes, but they eventually found a spot large enough for their final camp.

Good luck, my friend. And be safe.

We'll leave our oxygen tanks in case--

No, George. I won't hear it from you. You'll take the oxygen and get back down safe and sound.

I'm staying with you tonight so that I can help you in the morning.

And why aren't you going, Ang Nyima?

You've done more than enough. You must go down and get some rest.

Hillary and Tenzing saw their companions leave and paused for a while to admire the view.

Those beautiful mountain peaks – some of the tallest in the world – are now below us.

We're almost at the top of the world. I often dreamt of this as a boy, but I'm not sure whether this is still a dream.

They were now about to be camped at the highest point in the history of Everest, just 344 metres below the summit.

Though the camp area was large enough, the ground was far from level. They chipped at the ice to make it as level as possible, at least enough for them to put up the tent.

I have tethered the empty oxygen tanks to the tent, Tenzing. It will stop the tent from blowing away.

After setting the tent up, all they had to do was wait for dawn.

Tomorrow is a big day.

They were excited and happy, but they had no idea of the problems their friends had faced while going down.

On their way back to Camp VIII, George Lowe, Alf Gregory, and Ang Nyima found their route covered by snow. And then, one by one, each ran out of oxygen. They could barely make it back to Camp VIII.

Not knowing the fate of their friends, Tenzing and Hillary waited for morning to come.

The morning of the day of their **assault**!

The wait until morning was a long one.

The last tin of apricots, Tenzing. I was saving them for tonight. Do you want to eat them frozen?

I think I'll wait until they heat up a bit. We also have some chicken soup, and if you want, I can make us the lemon drink too.

The lemon drink, made of melted snow, loads of sugar, and crystallised lemon, was a favourite of everyone in the expedition.

I think we can safely use some oxygen to sleep tonight. It will at least ensure us a good night's sleep.

The air being so thin and the weather so cold, the extra bit of oxygen helped them to calm their nerves.

That night, the two men kept drifting in and out of sleep every couple of hours.

WOOOOOSHHH!

It's only one in the morning and still dark outside. Did the wind wake you too, Ed?

Yes, it's pounding really hard against the tent. Let's get the stove going again and fix ourselves something hot to drink.

It was proving hard for them to stop all the nervous thoughts.

They finally woke up at four in the morning.

That's the Thyangboche Monastery where we had gone about two months ago.

Yes, and it's more than 5,000 metres below us. It's a beautiful sight, isn't it?

Let me do a quick equipment check.

Yes, and I will make one last batch of lemon drink before we begin our climb.

Looks like all the oxygen tanks are in good order.

But Hillary's boots were frozen stiff.

Only after an hour of cooking on the stove did they thaw enough to be put on again.

That stench of burning leather isn't appealing at all.

At 6.30 am, the two men were finally ready to begin their climb.

Why don't I take the lead? Your boots must still be stiff.

It was 29th May now, two months since they began their expedition.

I'm not quite sure if my mind is more tired or my body. Do you feel exhausted too, Ed?

Oh yes, I'm completely exhausted. And these brutal winds are chilling me to the bone, and they just keep getting colder.

Every minute, they were reminded of those who had come before them.

Those footsteps must be of Tom and Charles. I guess they thought this treacherous tower of rock would be easier to climb than trying to move up that way through the steep hill. What do you think, Ed?

I think we should take the steep snowy path.

And let's take turns leading the way.

They still had couple of hundred metres to go.

When their first two bottles of oxygen ran out, they abandoned them, thus eliminating the unnecessary weight.

It was just two men climbing the formidable mountain, one that **no man** had conquered before.

Hillary decided to squeeze into the gap between the rock and ice, and climb up the wall.

I think we **will** reach the top.

Tenzing followed him. This was his seventh time at Everest. He could **not** let this attempt end in defeat. Not again.

They almost reached the top of the ice wall.

It was another swing of the axe.

Another step through the crackling ice and the bitter cold.

Another step. Another grasp. Another--

This wall of rock and ice seems to be about twelve metres long. Do you think the summit is above this?

I have no idea, Tenzing. It's strange. We could always see the peak of Mt Everest from down below. But from this height, we are unable to see it.

They had done it. They had reached the top. Their dream had finally come true.

At 11.30 am on 29th May, they were atop the highest point in the world.

Two shy young boys, from different parts of the world, had conquered Mt Everest.

They took a moment to think of all those who had come before them. They even looked for traces of Mallory and Irvine, to see if they had reached the top in 1924 before they disappeared, but they found nothing.

Exhausted and low on oxygen, the celebration was a simple one – a quick handshake, followed by an embrace, and the sharing of a mint cake.

They buried Tenzing's daughter's pencil, John Hunt's crucifix, and a bit of chocolate as an offering to the mountain and the gods.

Hillary took in a deep breath of the air, a pocketful of stones...

Thuji chey*, Chomolungma.

*I am grateful.

In fifteen minutes, they started their descent. They left the flags of the UN, Britain, Nepal, and India as evidence that they had reached that far.

...and a few pictures with his camera.

They knew they had an even more tough job in hand... getting back down alive.

The descent proved extremely challenging.

They followed their old tracks wherever they could, and cut new steps when they had to.

When their oxygen ran out, the oxygen bottles abandoned by Evans and Bourdillon came in handy.

Then the water in their flasks froze, but they did not lose hope.

They reached Camp IX at 2.00 pm.

After collecting a few supplies, they abandoned the camp to the wind and snow.

The first friendly face they spotted belonged to George Lowe, waiting for them with hot tomato soup.

Well, George... we knocked the mountain off!

And from then on, it was celebrations galore. Each campsite they reached would celebrate.

Wilf Noyce and Pasang Phutar couldn't wait to share the good news with others. So they lay on their sleeping bags, arranged in T shape, to signify 'top'.

They hoped the people at Camp IV, where the bulk of the expedition was, would see their message.

But unfortunately, they never saw the message.

They're coming. Oh, it looks like they didn't do it. I don't think--

John, look! They did it. They have done it!!

That one triumphant wave of George Lowe's axe set off a massive stampede to see who could reach Tenzing and Hillary first.

The other Sherpas had never understood Tenzing's desire to reach the summit. They feared if anyone reached the top, the expeditions would stop.

But now they were all in awe.

They were ecstatic that one of them had conquered the world.

I can carry my own bag. I carried it all the way up the mountain!

Spectacular job... I... I think I'm speechless.

The expedition had not only reached the summit under Hunt's leadership, but there was also no loss of life, which was a tremendous achievement.

James Morris, a correspondent with the *London Times*, who was accompanying the expedition, rushed ahead to release the news.

By coincidence, Hillary and Tenzing had reached the summit just days before the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The news was released on 2nd June to coincide with that event. It was a grand victory for the British.

The news reached the rest of the world too.

He did it! Tenzing did it! It's all over the radio.

The accolades began pouring in while they were still going back to Kathmandu.

This is a joke, right? Am I being... knighted?

No joke. The mail just arrived. Congratulations... Sir Edmund.

Both Edmund Hillary and John Hunt were knighted by Great Britain.

TENZING ZINDABAD!

LONG LIVE TENZING!

Tenzing was awarded the Nepal Tara, or Star of Nepal, the highest honour that one could receive in Nepal, if not of royal birth.

The press hounded the two achievers.

Edmund! Who reached the top first?

Tenzing! Did you climb for India or for Nepal? Which one is your true homeland?

Is this a victory for Britain or for India?

The world wouldn't accept that the success was due to a team effort. To put a stop to the endless questioning, Edmund Hillary, Tenzing Norgay, and John Hunt jointly signed a statement on 22nd June 1953.

We reached the summit **almost together**.

All through this, Hillary had something else, too, on his mind. He was in love, with a woman called Louise Rose.

The two got married on 3rd September 1953.

But soon after his marriage, Hillary's thoughts turned to another adventure. In 1954, he became an expedition leader and attempted to conquer Makalu, the world's fifth highest mountain.

But that expedition was a failure as Hillary came down with severe dehydration.

Soon after, Dr Vivian Fuchs, an English explorer, planned the first overland crossing of Antarctica, with Hillary on board. As soon as Hillary joined in, the people of New Zealand flocked to donate money for the expedition.

This expedition proved successful, for on 4th January 1958, Hillary reached the South Pole.

Chicago, USA. 1959.

I'm proposing an expedition that will conduct a search for the mythical creature 'Yeti', and will also examine how humans adapt to high altitudes.

The funding for this expedition was approved by Field Enterprises. Hillary was no longer the young climber who had to pay his own way for an expedition.

Hillary also convinced Field Enterprises to fund for the construction of a school in the village of Khumjung in Nepal. By 1962, the construction of the school was complete.

The other villages in the region took notice, and started asking Hillary for help. He developed a reputation of being generous with the Sherpas, for he shared his time, influence, and access to money.

He then formed the Himalayan Trust to organise more building projects.

And when bringing supplies to Kathmandu became difficult, he even built an airstrip so that the supplies could be transported smoothly.

Tenzing and Hillary also got the strangest of offers.

I can make you a movie star, Tenzing. Think about it.

But they were not interested.

Tenzing was also offered positions on many expeditions. But he found himself veering down a different path in life.

Imagine, you could make a thousand Tenzings.

Think of it, Tenzing. A mountaineering school based in Darjeeling for the Indian people.

His achievement and world recognition led to a friendship with India's Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Dr B C Roy.

Tenzing went on to become the Director of Field Training for the new school, the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute.

He even travelled to Europe to become a certified Alpine guide, to ensure his rock climbing technique was as strong as the ice skills.

Half of all the climbing deaths in the Himalayas are of Sherpas. They deserve better compensation.

In 1963, he became the founder and president of the Sherpa Climbers Association, and fought to increase the pay for the Sherpas worldwide.

And he influenced a generation of young Sherpas, for more than 4,500 students were trained under Tenzing's watchful eyes.

Being a family man, Hillary would often allow his wife and children to join him during some of the larger projects that he undertook.

In 1975, he was involved in executing one of his largest projects ever – a hospital in the village of Paphlu, in Nepal.

Edmund Hillary's wife and Belinda, his youngest child, were to fly in from Kathmandu and join him in Paphlu.

They're... they're not here, Ed. Their plane crashed immediately after it took off from Kathmandu.

I'm sorry, Ed. They're gone.

In one brief moment, his family was shattered, and he was left alone to care for his two remaining children.

But there was still no stopping Edmund Hillary.

He continued the work he and his family were doing for the villagers. The opening ceremony for the hospital was held on 1st May 1976.

Burrah Sahib, as he was fondly called by the locals, was indeed proving to be a man with a large heart.

But despite all that Tenzing and Hillary brought to the mountains, they realised what they had lost too.

While the world came to Khumbu, the younger generation was venturing out of Nepal to find their place just as Tenzing had done. And their old customs, culture, and language were slowly being forgotten.

Most importantly, the environment was being torn apart. All the climbs on Everest had brought a spotlight to the area for the whole world to see.

And now there were tens of thousands of climbers and tourists charging through the region to visit the mountains, thus putting a massive strain on the limited resources of the local population.

Even Hillary and Tenzing's own expeditions were guilty, for they had left many of their supplies on the mountains and even cut down many trees to use as firewood at their base camps.

Hillary tried his best to limit the damage, and became the International Director of the World Wildlife Fund, and helped to spearhead a reforesting project in the area.

It was always one more challenge... one more peak to cross. Their work never stopped.

Edmund Hillary went on to lead an expedition down the Ganges River, and even joined astronaut Neil Armstrong on a trip to the North Pole. He also became New Zealand's High Commissioner to India in 1985.

On the other hand, Tenzing Norgay journeyed to almost every corner of the globe... Japan and Russia...

You know you look a lot like Tenzing Norgay. But he wouldn't be here in Norway. Any chance you're related?

...and then there was tragedy.

Tenzing Norgay died of a brain hemorrhage on 9th May 1986. The funeral procession was 1.6 kilometres long.

Clear the way for the hero!

The massive crowd parted for just one man.

Edmund Hillary continued with his work for more than 20 years, until he died of heart failure on 10th January 2008.

And the world mourned again.

Tenzing Norgay had once told one of his sons that while the peak of Everest is at the top of the world, there is an entire world full of people below it...

...an entire world full of places, **all** of them worth seeing. But **none** of them was visible from Everest's peak.

When Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay became the first to stand on top of the world, they became living legends, real life 20th-century heroes who had achieved the impossible.

That feat could have been their crowning achievement, and yet they managed to see what was not visible from their icy perch. They saw the country and the people that made them famous, and went on to become **great humanitarians**.

What made them truly heroic was the way they lived with the feat and the fame, using their achievement to better the lives of others. They were representatives not only of their nations but also of humanity.

Hillary and Tenzing's achievement as explorers will never be forgotten. Their legacy as real life heroes will live on forever in our minds.

GLOSSARY

Anna: Currency that was formerly used in India, equalling 1/16 of a rupee.

Burrah Sahib: Man of stature.

Himalayan Club: The Indian organisation that helped organise expeditions.

Icefall: A mass of constantly shifting and flowing ice that can create impossible crevasses or holes.

Lhotse: The world's fourth highest mountain at 8,516 metres.

North Col: The pass connecting Mt Everest and Chagtse in Tibet.

Sherpa: People originally from Tibet, now settled in Nepal, living high in the Himalayas, who are employed as guides for mountaineering expeditions.

Sirdar: The chief Sherpa in charge of all the Sherpas and porters.

South Col: The path connecting the peak of Lhotse and Mt Everest, which is taken by explorers to cross over to Everest.

Supply lines: The route over which food and gear are delivered.

Western Cwm (pronounced *coom*): A deep, icy valley leading to Lhotse.

NELSON MANDELA

This is the story of a man who was branded a terrorist, spent twenty-seven years in jail as a political prisoner, and later triumphed to become the father of the Republic of South Africa. This is the story of Nelson Mandela.

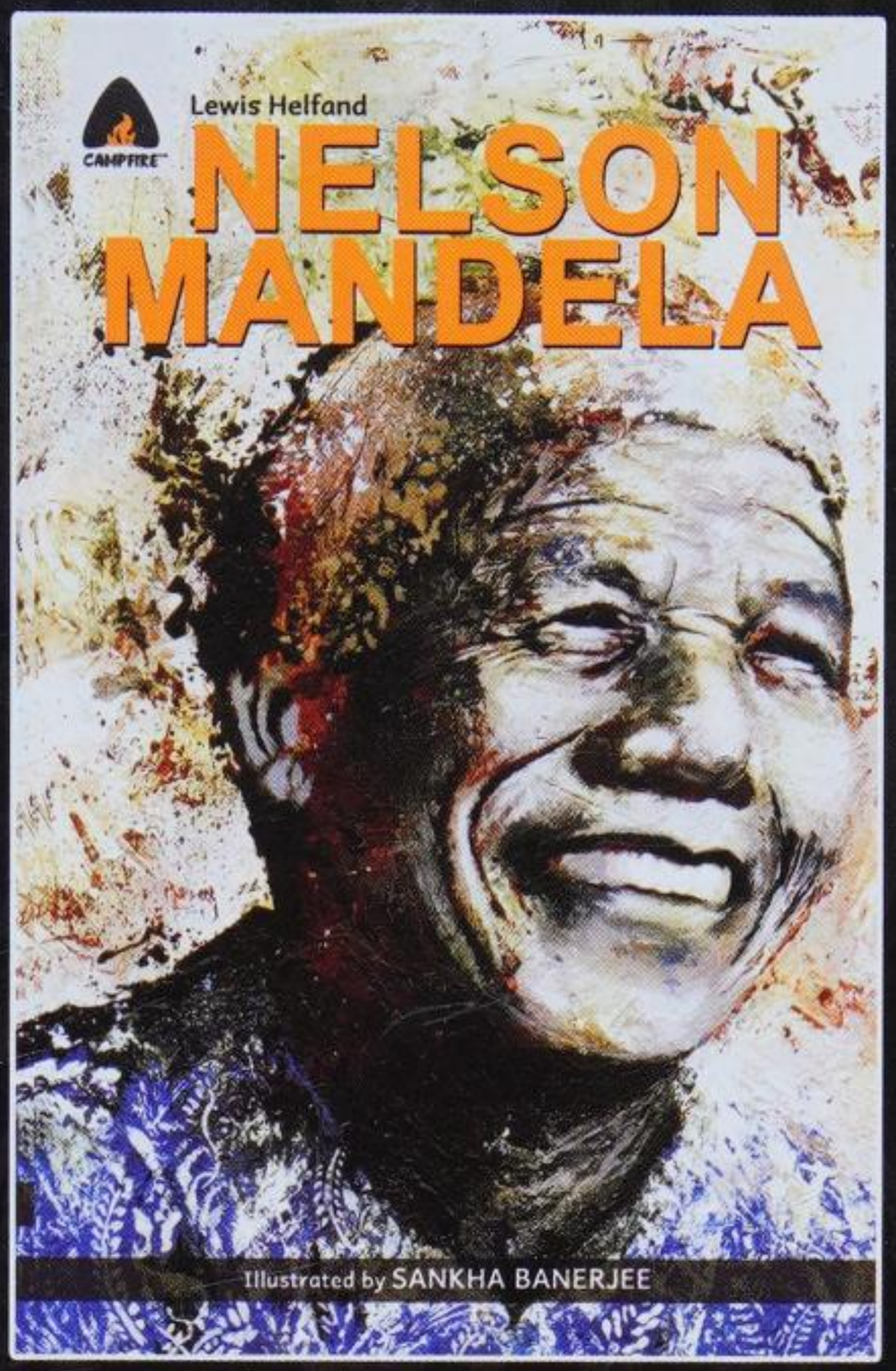
As a young man growing up in a small South African village, Nelson Mandela had very simple dreams. He dreamt of being free to choose his own path in life. But being a black man in South Africa – a nation ruled by an oppressive and discriminatory set of laws known as apartheid – even the simple dream of freedom could never become a reality.

But Mandela did not give up and took the lead in the fight for equality of all races. The government of South Africa responded to his pleas for justice by trying to crush him.

Mandela was stripped of his rights, and sent to the harshest prison in all of South Africa to die. But Nelson Mandela's spirit could not be broken. From his tiny prison cell, Nelson Mandela managed to rally the entire world behind his fight for justice. He even taught his oppressors the value of tolerance and compassion, and he brought freedom to an entire nation.

For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.

--Nelson Mandela



Written by Lewis Helfand
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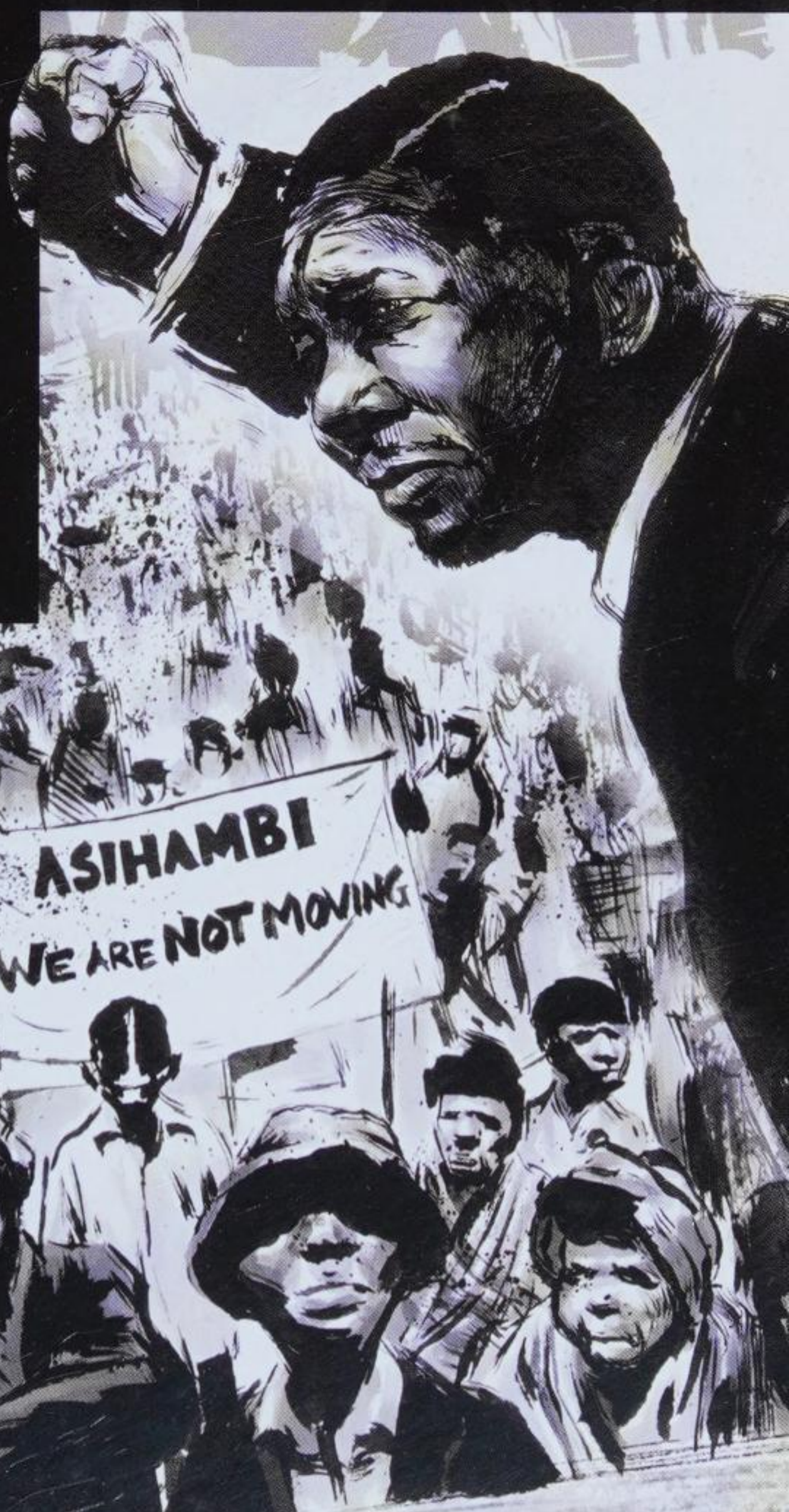

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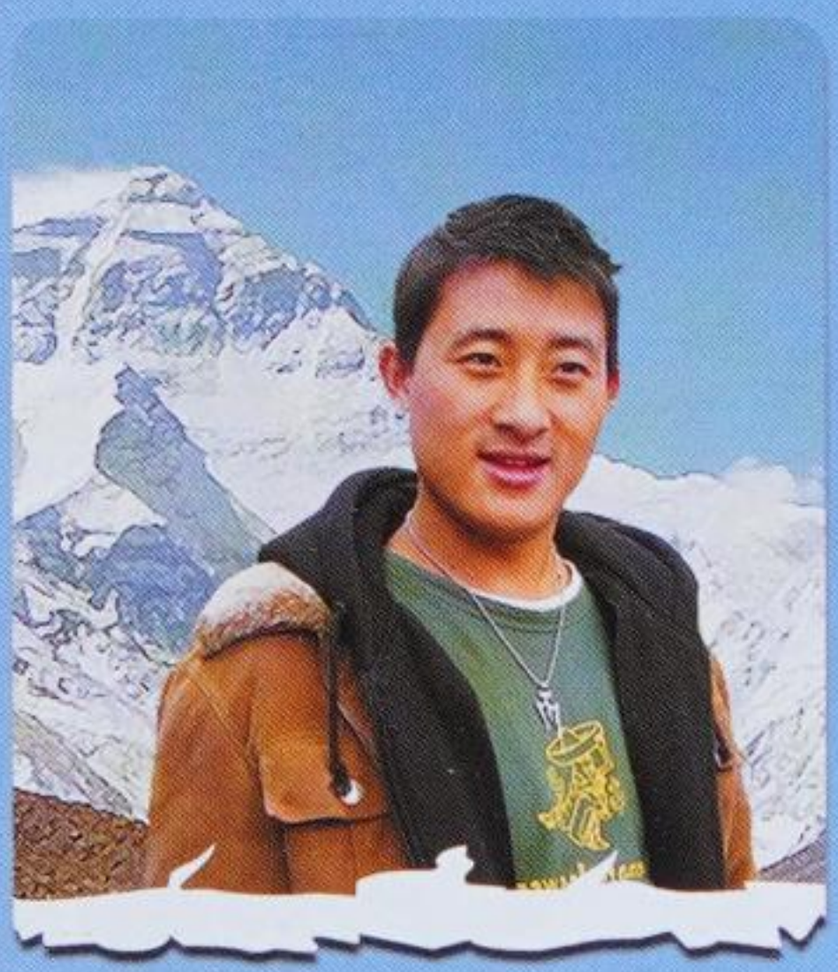
STANDING ON TOP OF THE WORLD

The ultimate test of endurance and one of the most gruelling climbs, Mt Everest, the highest mountain in the world, attracts experienced mountaineers year after year. And some of the people who have been successful in making it to the highest point on Earth, despite all the hazardous conditions, have been teenagers! Let's take a look at some of these young achievers.



On 22nd May 2001, fifteen-year-old Temba Tseri from Nepal became the youngest person to reach the top of Mt Everest from the Tibet side. But this feat was not achieved so easily. In June 2000, Temba had made his first attempt to climb Mt Everest, but bad weather conditions had forced him to turn back when he was just 70 feet from the summit! He suffered frostbite on both hands, and five of his fingers had to be amputated. But that did not stop him from trying again. In 2001, he tried again, and this time, he was successful.

At the age of sixteen, Arjun Vajpai added a new chapter to Indian mountaineering history by becoming the youngest Indian to reach the summit of Mt Everest. His long-cherished dream of scaling Everest came true on 22nd May 2010. An adventure-loving twelfth-grade student, Arjun is also a national taekwondo champion and has a keen interest in sports, especially volleyball and basketball. Arjun's team was led by Apa Sherpa, who broke his own record by becoming the only man to have scaled Everest twenty times!

Just a few hours after Arjun Vajpai reached the top of the world, Jordan Romero, a thirteen-year-old boy from Big Bear, California, USA, created history and broke all previous records by becoming the youngest person to have scaled Everest. Jordan's ascent began from Tibet as the Nepalese authorities do not give a climbing permit to anyone under the age of sixteen. His dream is to climb the highest peaks of all the seven continents of the world, out of which he has already scaled six!

Sherpa Power

Sherpas have always been an integral part of Everest expeditions. Let's know more about them.

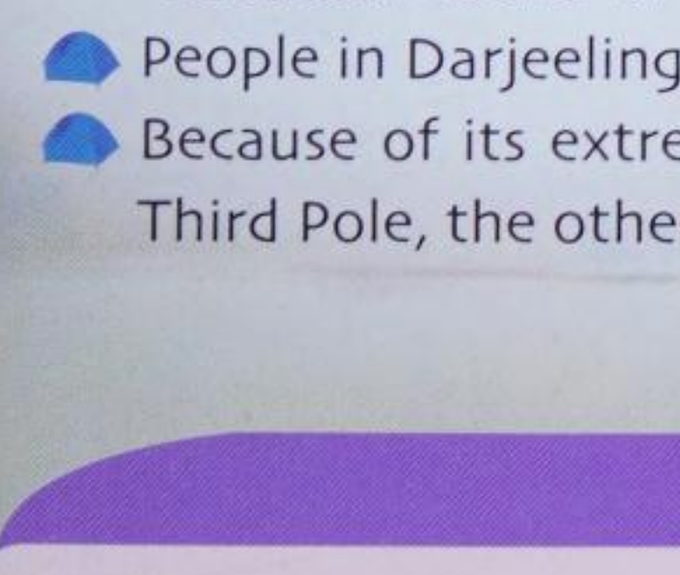
Over 500 years ago, a group of Tibetan Buddhists, known as the Sherpas, moved from Tibet to the region near Mt Everest in Nepal in order to be closer to the mountain they held sacred. The Sherpas are suited to the rigours of high-altitude climbing, and thus play a very important role in Everest climbing expeditions. Today, Sherpas constitute one quarter of the total number of people climbing Mt Everest.

The Many Names of Mount Everest

- Most people in Nepal call Mt Everest *Sagarmatha*, which means 'forehead in the sky'.
- Speakers of the Tibetan language call Mt Everest *Chomolungma*. It means 'Goddess Mother of the world'. In Tibet, it is also known as *Qomolangma*.
- People in Darjeeling, India, call it *Deodungha*, which means 'holy mountain'.
- Because of its extremity in terms of height, Mt Everest is also known as the Third Pole, the other two being the North Pole and the South Pole.

Did You Know?

- Mt Everest is approximately sixty million years old!
- Tibet, India, and Nepal are the countries visible from the summit.
- Mt Everest grows one centimetre every year!
- Mt Everest is also home to a very small black jumping spider, of the *Euophrys omnisuperstes* (which means 'standing above everything') species. These spiders lurk in crevices and feed on frozen insects. Their food depends mostly on what is blown by the wind into the area where they reside.



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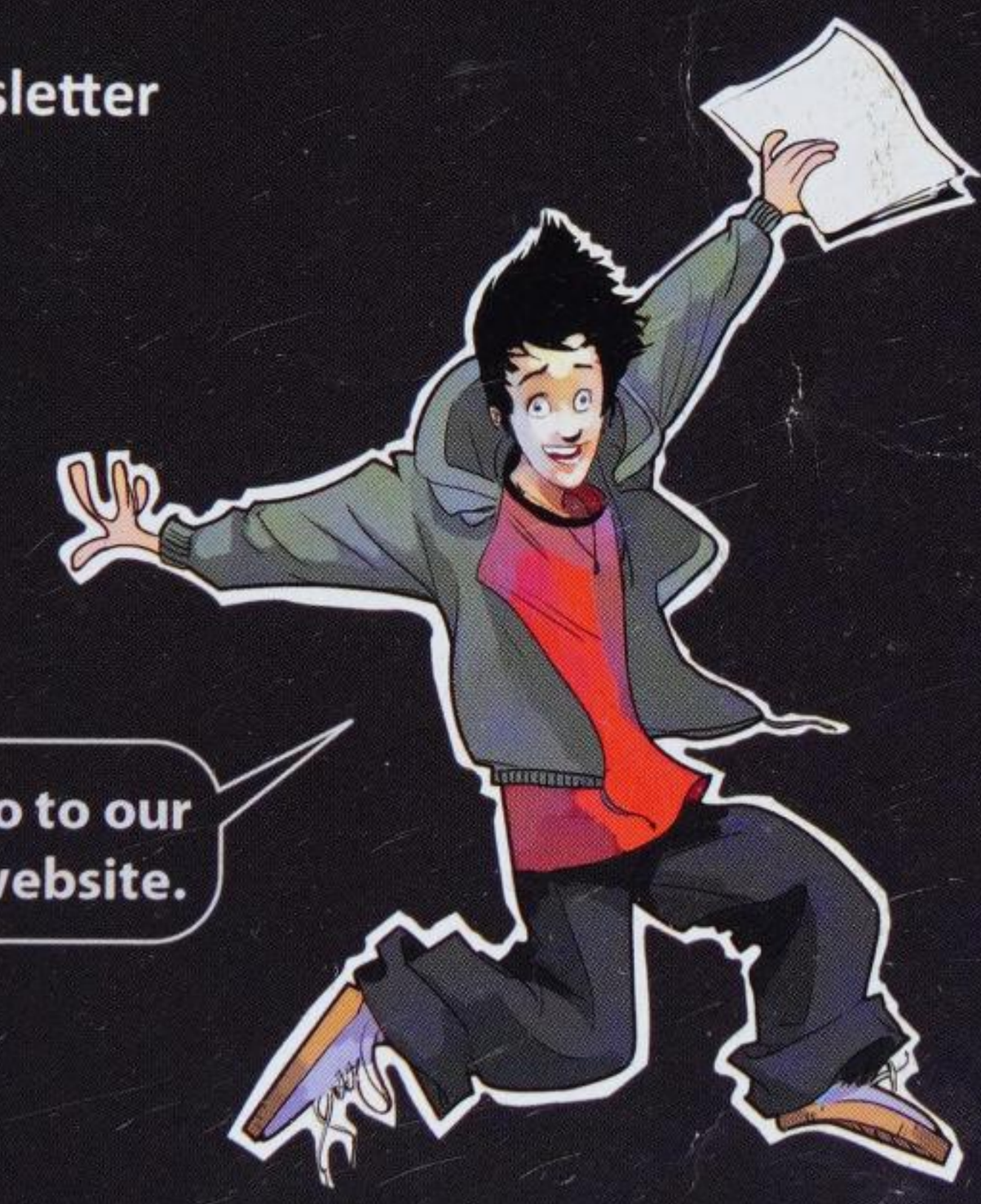

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